

NAXOS
AudioBooks

**NON-
FICTION**

**HISTORICAL
RECORDINGS**



Voices of Black America:

Historical
Recordings
of Poetry,
Humor & Drama
1908-1947

Booker T. Washington
Paul Laurence Dunbar
Langston Hughes
and others

NA224812D

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

- [1] Atlanta Exposition Address: excerpt 3:36
(Booker T. Washington)
Columbia 'Personal Record'
?Chicago, 5 December 1908

REV. J.A. MYERS

- [2] [A] Banjo Song (Paul Laurence Dunbar) 2:53
Victor 16446 9 December 1909
- [3] When Malindy Sings (Paul Laurence Dunbar) 3:51
Victor 35097 9 December 1909
- [4] The Ol' Tunes (Paul Laurence Dunbar) 2:34
Victor 16843 10 February 1911
- [5] In the Morning (Paul Laurence Dunbar) 2:26
Victor 16840 7 February 1911

EDWARD STERLING WRIGHT

- [6] A Little Christmas Basket (Paul Laurence Dunbar) 1:46
Edison Blue Amberol cylinder 2152
Issued February 1914
- [7] Howdy, Honey, Howdy! (Paul Laurence Dunbar) 1:51
Edison Blue Amberol cylinder 2152
Issued February 1914

JAMES WELDON JOHNSON

Four Readings from 'God's Trombones'

by John Weldon Johnson

Read by James Weldon Johnson

Musicraft Records, New York, recorded 1937-1938

Musicraft Album No. 21 (issued August, 1938)

- | | | |
|----|---|------|
| 8 | God's Trombones, no. 1: Listen, Lord – A Prayer
Musicraft 1084 | 2:45 |
| 9 | God's Trombones, no. 2: The Creation
Musicraft 1083 | 4:10 |
| 10 | God's Trombones, no. 3: The Prodigal Son
Musicraft 1084 | 5:57 |
| 11 | God's Trombones, no. 4: Go Down Death –
A Funeral Sermon
Musicraft 1083 | 4:23 |

LANGSTON HUGHES

Poems by Langston Hughes

Read by Langston Hughes

Asch Records, distributed by Stinson, New York,
recorded 1944-1945

Asch Album A 454 (issued 1945)

- | | | |
|----|----------------------|------|
| 12 | Florida Road Workers | 0:39 |
|----|----------------------|------|

13	Good Morning, Stalingrad Asch 4542	2:14
14	To Captain Mulzac ([The] Negro Skipper of the Booker T. Washington Sailing with a Mixed Crew) Asch 4541	3:03
15	[The] Negro Speaks of Rivers	0:48
16	Mother to Son	0:49
17	Ma Lord	0:41
18	I, Too [Sing America] Asch 4541	0:35
19	Harlem Sweeties	1:13
20	Sylvester's Dying Bed [The Death of a Mighty Lover]	1:03
21	Wake	0:10
22	[A] Little Lyric (Of Great Importance) Asch 4543	0:08
23	Porter	0:22
24	Brass Spittoons	1:10
25	Ku Klux [Klan]	0:35
26	Merry-Go-Round ([A] Colored Child at Carnival) Asch 4542	0:34

27	The Weary Blues	1:32
28	Too Blue	0:33
29	Could Be [Blues]	0:36
30	Late Last Night [Blues] Asch 4543	0:26
31	Still Here	0:21
32	Ballad of the Landlord	1:10
33	Big Buddy	0:38
34	Note on Commercial Theatre Asch 4544	0:46
35	Little Songs	0:10
36	Silence	0:12
37	Burden	0:10
38	Havana Dreams	0:28
39	[The] Breath of a Rose	0:30
40	Prayer	0:19
41	Border Line	0:19
42	In Time of Silver Rain Asch 4544	0:42

CHARLEY CASE

- | | | | |
|-----------|--|-------------------------|------|
| 43 | Experiences in the Show Business
(Charley Case)
Victor 16354 | New York, 18 March 1909 | 3:13 |
| 44 | How Mother Made the Soup (Charley Case)
Victor 5693 | New York, 18 March 1909 | 2:49 |
| 45 | Father as a Scientist (Charley Case)
Victor 16328 | New York, 18 March 1909 | 2:52 |

BERT WILLIAMS

- | | | | |
|-----------|--|---|--------------|
| 46 | You Can't Do Nothin' Till Martin Gets Here
(?Bert Williams)
Columbia A6216 | New York, 3 January 1913 | 4:19
3:18 |
| 47 | How? Fried! (Lucas)
Columbia A6216 | New York, 3 January 1913 | |
| 48 | Elder Eatmore's Sermon on Generosity
(Alex Rogers)
Columbia A6141 | New York, 27 June 1919
Assisted by Alex Rogers, Bob Slater, Mary Straine
and probably Mattie Hite, organist | 3:45 |
| 49 | Elder Eatmore's Sermon on Throwing Stones
(Alex Rogers)
Columbia A6141 | New York, 27 June 1919
Assisted by Alex Rogers, Bob Slater, Mary Straine
and probably Mattie Hite, organist | 4:15 |

CHARLES S. GILPIN

- [50] A Humorous Address to the Musicians (?) 3:27
Arto 9102 New York,
c. July-September 1921

J. ROSAMOND JOHNSON

- [51] Darktown Literary Debate 3:21
(J. Rosamond Johnson)
Ajax 17061 New York, c. September-
October 1924
- [52] Gambling Dan (J. Rosamond Johnson) 3:37
Ajax 17061 New York, September-
October 1924

PAUL ROBESON

- [53] Songs of Innocence, no. 4 :
The Little Black Boy (William Blake) 2:19
HMV B8918 London, 9 May 1939
- [54] Othello – Shakespeare, with Ainsworth Arnold 6:42
(Gratiano) and Alexander Scourby (Brabantio)
OTHELLO Act 1 Scene 3
GRATIANO: Here comes Brabantio and the valiant Moor
OTHELLO: O Most potent, grave, and reverend signiors
OTHELLO: O Come hither, gentle mistress

55 New York, 8 August 1944

Freedom Train (Langston Hughes)

2:59

Private issue:

no number c. 1947

Total time: 1:46:43

PRODUCTION:

William Shaman and Peter G. Adamson

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: Dr Frederick Crane,
Edward Durbeck, the late Dr Victor Girard,
David Lennick, Susan Nelson and Ward Marston

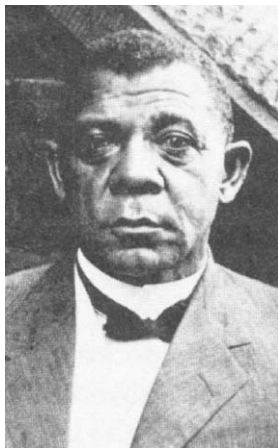
Voices of Black America:

Historical Recordings of Poetry, Humor & Drama – 1908-1947

Notes on the Speakers and the Recordings

Booker T. (Aliaferro) Washington (Franklin County, Virginia, circa 5 April 1856 – Tuskegee, Alabama, 14 November 1915). Washington was a prominent nineteenth-century social leader and educator, the founder of the Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama (1881). His influential autobiography, *Up From Slavery*, was published in 1901.

The famous ten-minute address excerpted on this private record – the only known recording of his voice – was originally delivered at the opening of the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta, Georgia, on 18 September 1895. Long known as ‘The Atlanta Compromise’, it would have a substantial impact on race relations in America and, accordingly, has undergone considerable reappraisal by successive



Booker T. Washington: undated portrait

generations of social historians. On the recording, Washington reads the first through the third paragraphs complete, skips the fourth, and closes in the middle of the fifth, with only minor alterations to the original published text (generally, added and deleted conjunctions and adapted pronouns). This Columbia Personal Record was reissued in 1919 or 1920 on Broome Records, one of the earliest African-American owned record labels first advertised by owner George W. Broome in *The Crisis* in May, 1918. Numbered Broome No. A, it was simply a Columbia pressing with a

Broome label pasted over.

James Andrew Myers (c. 1878-1928). Myers spent his later years as professor of religion at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, and was the second tenor of the



REVEREND JAMES A. MYERS: *The Fisk [University] Jubilee Singers – from the November, 1912 Victor Records catalog of the Victor Talking Machine Company*

famous Fisk Jubilee Singers. He often gave readings of Dunbar's poems in the male quartet's public appearances. Four of the Fisk [University] Jubilee Singers' Victor recordings, sung by Messrs. Work, Ryder, Myers and O'Hara, were coupled with Myers' readings. The original labels read 'Rev. J.A. Myers | of Fisk University', the selections labeled 'Dialect Recitations'. Take –2 of *When Malindy Sings*, recorded on 21 December 1909, was assigned for issue as Victor 35097, according to company ledgers, but all copies inspected used the rejected take –1 from 9 December.

Edward Sterling Wright (?-?). Though he may have been a prominent actor, little is known about Edward Sterling Wright. Even the original slips accompanying his Edison cylinders give no career details.

He made only three four-minute Blue Amberol cylinders, all in 1914. Five of the six titles he recorded were Dunbar poems.

The earliest publication of the poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar (Dayton, Ohio,

27 June 1872 – Dayton, 9 February 1906) recorded by Rev. Myers and Edward Sterling Wright were as follows:

A Banjo Song in *Oak and Ivy*, the first published collection of Dunbar's poems (Dayton, Ohio: Press of the United Brethren Publishing House, 1893); *When Malindy Sings* in *Majors and Minors* (Toledo, Ohio: Hadley and Hadley, 1895), *Harper's Weekly* (27 June 1896), and *Current Literature* (September, 1896); *The Ol' Tunes* in *Indianapolis Journal* (Summer, 1892) and *Oak and Ivy* (*ibid.*); *In the Morning* in *Lyrics of Love and Laughter* (New York: Dodd, Meade and Co., 1903); *A Little Christmas Basket* in *Lyrics of Love and Laughter* (*ibid.*); and *Howdy, Honey, Howdy!* in the *Burlington [Iowa] Hawk-Eye* (8 June 1902) and *Chattanooga Times* (15 June 1902).

James Weldon Johnson (Jacksonville, Florida, 17 June 1871 – Wiscasset, Maine, 26 June 1938). Johnson was an author, lyricist, critic, editor, diplomat (serving in the federal Consular Service, 1906-1913), and educator. He was the NAACP's first field secretary (1916-1920) and its first, influential executive secretary throughout the 1920s. His most prominent publications included *Fifty Years & Other Poems* (1917), *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922), two collections of American Negro spirituals, in collaboration with his brother,



James Weldon Johnson: booklet for *Musicraft Album 21*, Four Readings from "God's Trombones" (1938)

J. Rosamond Johnson (1925 and 1926), Black Manhattan (1930), *Negro Americans, What Now?* (1934), and two autobiographies – *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912; 1927) and *Along This Way: The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson* (1933).

God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse was published in April, 1927 by the Viking Press, New York. Inspired by his frequent travels throughout the country as an NAACP speaker (1916-1931), *The Creation* dates from 1920, the other six sermons from late 1926. In this rare Musicraft set, his only commercial recordings, Johnson reads the opening prayer and the first three sermons. The records were issued posthumously – first listed in the Gramophone Shop (New York) Record Supplement for August, 1938, less than two months after Johnson's death in an automobile accident – as dubbed from instantaneous discs made circa 1937 or early 1938.

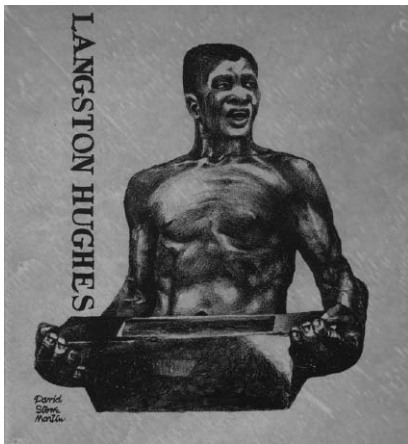
[James] Langston Hughes (Joplin, Missouri, 1 February 1902 – New York, 22 May 1967). Poet and author Langston



Langston Hughes: undated portrait

Hughes was one of the vivid, defining figures of what has become known as the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. The original Asch set, Hughes' first commercial recordings, was titled variously Langston Hughes on Asch Records, Langston Hughes Poems, and Poems by Langston Hughes. It was first listed in the Gramophone Shop Record Supplement for May, 1945, but may have been recorded as early as August, 1944: the preceding matrix numbers, 710-712 and 714-715, belong to the Mary Lou Williams Trio session recorded in New York on 10 August 1944 (though in fact the numbers etched in the waxes of Asch pressings may not be the actual master numbers). The matrix number missing from the Hughes sequence (723) was not used in the set.

Many of the Hughes poems underwent significant changes in both text and title by the time they were published. Composite titles, using brackets, are given in the listing, reconciling the Asch labels, Hughes' own announcements within the recordings,



Poems by Langston Hughes: *the original Davis Stone Martin cover art for Asch Album A 454 (1945)*

and the actual published titles. The liner notes to the album describe the material as 'a group of poems from Poetry, Esquire and other magazines, not yet published in book form, plus several new ones hitherto unpublished anywhere'. The 1942 Shakespeare in Harlem collection is also mentioned, but none of these citations helps to date the actual recordings – indeed, Hughes had published frequently in both *Poetry* and *Esquire* years before the set could possibly have been recorded.

While a majority of the poems appeared subsequently in well-known collections and anthologies, their original publication was as follows: *Florida Road Workers* in the New York Herald Tribune (23 November 1930); *Good Morning, Stalingrad* in Jim Crow's Last Stand (Atlanta: Negro Publication Society of America, 1943); *To Captain Mulzac* in Jim Crow's Last Stand (ibid.); *[The] Negro Speaks of Rivers* in The Crisis (June, 1921); *Mother to Son* in The Crisis (December, 1922); *Ma Lord* in The Crisis (June, 1927); *I, Too [Sing America]*, aka 'Epilogue', in Survey Graphic (1 March 1925); *Harlem Sweeties* in Shakespeare in Harlem (New York: Knopf, 1942); *Sylvester's Dying Bed [The Death of a Mighty Lover]* in Poetry (October, 1931); *Wake* in Shakespeare in Harlem (ibid.); *[A] Little Lyric [Of Great Importance]* in the Carmel Pine Cone (21 March, 1941); *Porter* in Fine Clothes to the Jew (New York: Knopf, 1927); *Brass Spittoons* in New Masses (December, 1926); *Ku Klux [Klan]* in Shakespeare in Harlem (ibid.); *Merry-Go-Round* in Common Ground (Spring, 1942); *The Weary Blues* in Opportunity (May, 1925); *Too Blue* in Contemporary Poet (Autumn, 1943); *Could Be [Blues]* in One-Way Ticket (New York: Knopf, 1949); *Late Last Night [Blues]* in One-Way Ticket (ibid.); *Still Here* in Jim Crow's Last Stand (ibid.);

Ballad of the Landlord in *Opportunity* (December, 1940); *Big Buddy* in *Negro Quarterly* (Spring, 1942); *Note on Commercial Theatre* in *The Crisis* (March, 1940); *Silence* in the *Carmel Pine Cone* (18 July 1941); *Burden* in the *Carmel Pine Cone* (14 November 1941); *Havana Dreams* in *Opportunity* (June, 1933); *[The] Breath of a Rose* in *The Big Sea* (New York: Knopf, 1940); *Border Line* in *Fields of Wonder* (New York: Knopf, 1947); and *In Time of Silver Rain* in *Opportunity* (June, 1938). *Little Songs* [*Gather out of loneliness | All the songs you know*] appears to be unpublished and is not to be confused with *'Lonely people | In the lonely night'*, from *Fields of Wonder* (ibid.) or *'Carmencita Loves Patrick'*, from the *'18 Poems for Children'*, first published in the *Langston Hughes Reader* (New York: Braziller, 1958). These published poems both appeared under the title *'Little Song'*. Similarly *Prayer* may not have been published. It is not listed in any Hughes bibliography, nor does it appear in the collected works. It is neither *'I ask you this'* (*Buccaneer*, 1925) or *'Gather up | In the arms of your pity'* (*Contempor-neos*, September-October, 1931), aka *'Big City Prayer'*, both published under the title *'Prayer'*.

Hughes reads what is essentially the original 1930 published version of *Florida*

Road Workers, beginning at line three of the revisions (1931-1949), with the first and part of the last short stanzas as the conclusion, but with the revised lines ten and eleven, originally published as *'For the rich old white men to sweep over in their big cars'*. As published, *Porter* ends *'Yes, sir!'* without *'... boss. Yes, sir!'* The reading of *Ku Klux [Klan]*, published as *'Ku Klux'*, substitutes *'A klansman said, "Listen ..."* for *'A klansman said, "Nigger ..."* in the final stanza. In the published version of *Could Be [Blues]*, the last two lines of the third stanza are *'Might be that you'll come back, | Like as not you won't;'* in the final stanza, *'Hastings Street'* and *'Lennox Avenue'* replace *'Central'* and *'Wiley'* Avenues. Hughes' reading of *Late Last Night [Blues]* contains an unpublished repeat of the first two lines. Line two of the original 1940 published version of *Note on Commercial Theatre* was *'You sing 'em in Paris'* instead of *'Broadway'* and this early version ended without the last line, which was added in 1943 and revised again in 1959. The insertion of *'I reckon ...'* is unique to the recording. *Havana Dreams* was omitted from the label of Asch 4544.

All of the other differences between the recordings and the published texts are simple, single-word substitutions or omissions.

Charley Case (Lockport, New York, c.1858 – New York City, 27 November 1916). This most unusual comedian, remembered now for the dead-pan humor of his three Victor recordings, was evidently of part-Irish, part-African-American descent. He abandoned a law practice in the early years of the last century, first to become a peddler, then a very successful black-face entertainer, billing himself initially as *The Man Who Talks About His Father*. His gentle, self-effacing vignettes, with their sly, unspoken punchlines, seem endearingly out-of-step with the boisterous style of early vaudeville comedy.

Case died of what was ruled an accidental, self-inflicted gunshot wound.

Bert Williams (born Egbert Austin Williams, Antigua or Nassau, British West Indies, 12 November 1874 – New York, 4 March 1922). Bert Williams was among the first African-American entertainers to forge a truly international reputation and with his partner, George W. Walker (1873-1911), was one of the authentic architects of black musical theater in America. Beginning modestly in Victor Herbert's *The Gold Bug* (1896) and gradually establishing star credentials in a number of early shows (among them, *The Policy Players*, 1899, and *Sons of Ham*, 1900), the team eventually produced Paul Laurence Dunbar and



Bert Williams: undated portrait

Will Marion Cook's *In Dahomey* (Boston Music Hall, 22 September 1902; New York Theater, 18 February 1903; and Shaftesbury Theater, London, 16 May 1903), generally considered to be the first full-length musical written and performed by African-Americans to play a legitimate

New York City house (E.E. Rice's celebrated 1898 *Clorindy, or The Origin of the Cakewalk*, the work of Dunbar and Ernest Hogan, enjoyed only a brief run at New York's Casino Roof Garden). *Abyssinia* (1906) and *Bandana Land* (1908) followed. After Walker's premature retirement in 1909, Williams entered the New York mainstream as a Keith Procter Circuit solo act and thereafter, as a Ziegfeld star (1910-1919). His last New York stage appearance in *The Broadway Brevities* of 1920 was followed by a final show, *Under the Bamboo Tree* (aka *The Pink Slip*), which played Cincinnati, Chicago and Detroit in the winter of 1921 and 1922.

Between October 1901 and February 1922, Williams recorded prolifically for Victor and Columbia. The four titles included here

are Williams's only recorded monologues and, as such, are a delightful supplement to the comic character songs that dominate his recorded legacy and the graceful physical humor that survives in his few silent film appearances. If the situation comedy of the two Elder Eatmore sermons was perhaps closer to the material used in his eight Ziegfeld Follies appearances, the wistful embellishment of the two simpler gags, *How? Fried!* and *You Can't Do Nothin' Till Martin Gets Here*, better illustrates Williams' legendary ingenuity as a storyteller.

Neither catalogs nor record labels cite the author of *Martin*, while *How? Fried!* is credited on Columbia A6216 to 'Lucas' and may be the work of Sam 'Dad' Lucas (1840-1916), an eminent African-American minstrel performer. It could not be determined if either of these monologues (or even the better-known Eatmore Sermons) were actually used by Williams on the stage. Two takes of *Elder Eatmore's Sermon on Generosity* (-2 and -3), both recorded on 27 June 1919, were issued as Columbia A6141.

Carles (Sidney) Gilpin (Richmond, Virginia, 20 November 1878 – Eldridge Park, New Jersey, 6 May 1930). An actor, singer, author of several published plays, theatrical manager and producer, Gilpin is best

remembered for creating the role of Brutus Jones in Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* (Provincetown Playhouse, New York, 1 November 1920, and revival, 1926), for which he won both the Spingarn Medal and the Drama League Award. Heywood Brown, reviewing the original production for the *New York Tribune*, called Gilpin's '... the most thrilling performance we have seen any place this season.'

The actor's career began with the Perkus and Davis Great Southern Minstrel Barn Storming Aggregation in 1896 and later included appearances with the Canadian Jubilee Singers, Hamilton, Ontario (1903), the Pekin Stock Company, Chicago (1907-1908), and the Pan American Octette (1911-1913). Vaudeville and frequent professional activity in Canada occupied him until his appointment as producer of the Lafayette Players in Harlem, a post he held from 1916 to 1919. There were also early, minor appearances in Gus Hill's *The Smart Set* company (1905), Williams and Walker's *Abyssinia* (1906), and Alex Rogers and Henry Creamers' *Old Man's Boy* (1913), the latter produced by the Negro Player's Stock Company. Gilpin's critical success as the preacher, William Custis, in John Drinkwater's *Abraham Lincoln* (Cort Theater, 15 December 1919) undoubtedly prompted his casting as Brutus Jones.

Problems of temperament and drink, as well as accusations that he took unreasonable liberties with the printed script (specifically, with language he felt might be offensive to blacks), eventually cost Gilpin a 1925 revival of *The Emperor Jones* at New York City's 52nd Street Theater (a major success for Paul Robeson) as well as a proposed part in the first production of Hecht and MacArthur's *The Front Page* (1928). By this time, his career was over.

The single side for Arto included here, labeled 'A Humorous Address to the Musicians by Charles Gilpin of Emperor Jones Fame', was also issued as Cleartone C-120 and is Gilpin's only known recording. He made two films for the Afro-American Film Company in 1914 and one for the Colored Players Film Corporation of Philadelphia in 1926, but none of these is in circulation. Authorship of the Arto monologue and the identity of the voice that introduces Gilpin are not labeled on either release. The performance was subsequently reissued as GB Record 2001-B, 'Charles S. Gilpin's



Charles S. Gilpin: as Brutus Jones in The Emperor Jones, portrait by Francis Bruguière (probably 1920)

Address to the Musicians', matrix 2001-B. Coupled with James Burris' 'Tain't No Place for Me' (matrix 2001A), as were the Arto and Cleartone originals, this was probably a private issue, the name derived perhaps from the initials of Gilpin and Burris. It is not known if GB 2001 consisted of pressings or dubbings.

J(ohn). Rosamond Johnson (Jackson, Florida, 11 August 1873 – New York, 11 November 1954). A graduate of the New England Conservatory of Music, Johnson was an accomplished singer, composer, conductor and arranger, as well as an author and educator. He appeared in vaudeville early in his career, touring North America and Europe, but it was in collaboration with lyricists Bob Cole (1868-1911) and James Weldon Johnson, his brother, that he began to contribute songs to many major Broadway shows, most notably in the period 1900-1914. The best known of these, *Under the Bamboo Tree*,



*J. Rosamond Johnson:
undated portrait*

interpolated into *Sally in Our Alley* (1902), was an enormous hit, as were many others, including *L'il Gal* (1902), immortalized by Paul Robeson, and *Since You Went Away* (1913). *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, lyrics by James Weldon Johnson, became the official song of the NAACP. In later years, Johnson appeared again as a performer in the original New York production of *Cabin in*

the *Sky* (1940) and a major revival of *Porgy and Bess* at New York's Majestic Theater on 22 January 1942. He was a noted editor of song anthologies, producing *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* (1925), *The Second Book of Negro Spirituals* (1926), *Mountainside Melodies* (1934), *Library of Negro Music* (1935), *Rolling Along in Song* (1937) and *Album of Negro Spirituals* (1940) among others.

The titles included here are Johnson's only known recorded monologs. *Ajax 17061* was also issued under lease as *Apex 670*, both labels having been products of the Canadian Campo Co., Ltd.

Paul Robeson (Princeton, New Jersey, 9 April 1898 – Philadelphia, 23 January 1976). Paul Robeson was in many respects the pre-eminent African-American performer of his generation. His achievements as an actor, concert singer and social-humanitarian activist were among the most impressive of any twentieth-century figure.



Paul Robeson: as Othello (London, 1930)



Paul Robeson: portrait by Frank Bauman (1941)

Although his conception of the role always provoked controversy, Robeson was one of the celebrated Othellos of his day. He undertook Shakespeare's Moor no less than three times in his long career – in London (Savoy Theatre, 19 May 1930); in the famous Theater Guild production produced by Margaret Webster (Schubert Theater, 19 October 1943), the longest-running Shakespearian production in the history of American theater; and in Stratford-on-Avon under Tony Richardson's direction (Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 7 April 1959). A nearly complete 78 rpm studio recording of the 1943 production, with members of the original cast (set M 544, issued in three volumes), was made

for American Columbia in the summer of 1944 and from this, the Act V Scene 3 has been drawn. Robeson made only two earlier spoken-word recordings, both for the Gramophone Company in London. One of these, the fourth poem of William Blake's *Songs of Innocence* (1789), is included here. His recording of Langston Hughes' *Freedom Train*, issued privately on a single-sided shellac 78 and labeled PRODUCED BY | THE SOUTHERN CONFERENCE | FOR HUMAN WELFARE | 808 PERDIDO STREET | New Orleans, La. | FREEDOM TRAIN | a poem by LANGSTON HUGHES | Narrated by PAUL ROBESON | Recorded by Permission of | OUR WORLD MAGAZINE, is an especially choice item. The poem, first published in *The New Republic* (September 1947) and *Our World* (October 1947), is announced by Robeson as 'Checking the Freedom Train'. This alternate title, coupled with extensive deviations between the text as read and as later published, suggest that an early, working version of the poem is being recited.

Notes by William Shaman

Producer's Note:

The recordings presented on these compact discs were made between 1908 and 1947 and, as might be expected, vary in quality. Rarity, condition, and the quality of the original recordings themselves all became major factors in their presentation. A few the Booker T. Washington, Charles Gilpin and J. Rosamond Johnson sides are extremely rare in their original form and can be found only on poor-quality shellac. To make matters worse, the copies available to us were not pristine. Robeson's *Freedom Train* may exist in only a few copies: the disc used was severely damaged, requiring computer technology to reduce excessive noise. Both of the sets included James Weldon Johnson's *God's Trombones* and *Poems by Langston Hughes*, and were transcribed from mint copies, though the former, as published, consisted of dubbings from instantaneous discs and the latter was pressed on inferior material. Similarly, Charley Case's *Father as a Scientist* was released by Victor as a mechanical dubbing (designated S/8 in the wax) and could only be matched approximately to the sound of the other two sides recorded during the same session.

Little was done initially to alter the sound of the original recordings but, ultimately, an effort to make them

accessible to as large an audience as possible was seen as the most logical compromise.

**William Shaman
Peter Adamson**

Voices of Black America: Historical Recordings of Poetry, Humor & Drama 1908-1947

Booker T. Washington • Paul Laurence Dunbar • Langston Hughes
and others

This unique collection, compiled especially for Naxos AudioBooks, features original recordings from 1908-1947 of Booker T. Washington's Atlanta Exposition Address, the poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar and Langston Hughes, rarely heard humor of Charley Case, readings from God's Trombones by James Weldon Johnson, and much more.

CD ISBN:

978-962-634-248-0

View our catalogue online at

www.naxosaudiobooks.com



Compiled & Produced by William Shaman
& Peter G. Adamson

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. UNAUTHORISED PUBLIC PERFORMANCE,
BROADCASTING AND COPYING OF THESE COMPACT DISCS PROHIBITED.
© 2002 NAXOS Audiobooks Ltd. © 2002 NAXOS Audiobooks Ltd.
Made in Germany.

Total time
1:46:43